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Obituary

DR. HENDRIK VERWOERD

Dr. Verwoerd, the South African Prime Minister, who was assassinated on Tuesday, was before and during the war an outspoken Nazi sympathiser. But after the destruction of Nazism, his own attitude towards Jews appeared to have changed and only two weeks ago he told a visiting B'nai B'rith official in Johannesburg of his pleasure at the decline of anti-semitism in South Africa.

His first known public expression of opinion on a political matter was in 1936 when he was professor of applied psychology at Stellenbosch University. With five of his colleagues he joined in an appeal to General Hertzog, then Prime Minister of South Africa, not to allow Jewish refugees from Germany to land in the Union. In 1937, when he became editor of the Nationalist newspaper, "Die Transvaler," his first leading article was on the subject of the Jews whom he accused of serving Jewish and not South African interests.

Since he became Prime Minister

In 1958, Dr. Verwoerd on many occasions demonstrated his intention to cultivate the good will of South African Jews. Yet something of his old prejudices came to light when in 1961 Israel joined in the anti-apartheid vote at the United Nations. A startling letter which he wrote at the time suggested that he regarded his Jewish co-citizens as hostages for Israel's behaviour.

The deterioration thereafter of relations between South Africa and Israel brought about further statements from Dr. Verwoerd which were intended to minimise the effect of his first outburst. In 1962 he said: "I warn that neither the actions of Israel at the United Nations nor the actions of certain people in this land must lead to antisemitism."

Within South Africa Dr. Verwoerd was the apostle of the doctrine of apartheid. His intellectual abilities and his resistance to compromise brought about a greater definition in legislation of the degrees of racial separation than had ever before been attempted. He modified the original concept of apartheid into a more refined theory of "separate development" and to that end encouraged the creation of African homelands under partial self-government within the territory of South Africa.

But neither in his attitude towards the Jews nor in his racial policies at home was Dr. Verwoerd by any means the most extreme leader of the Nationalist Party. It remains to be seen whether, as a result of his death, the ruling party may not come under even more radical influences.

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